

men or lesbians. Until one does, there is absolutely no need for Congress to consider whether other States are, or should be, obligated to recognize such marriages.

Second, it is clear to me that this legislation is politically motivated. By making this unnecessary bill a priority of this Congress, while failing to act on numerous other measures of much more immediate importance, the Republican leadership has made clear its desire to try to embarrass those who have traditionally supported equal rights for all Americans, including gays and lesbians.

Third, I do not believe that most Rhode Islanders or most Americans think that this a matter of urgent national importance requiring congressional action. Prior to the introduction of this legislation, I had not received one letter or phone call expressing concern about gay or lesbian marriages. And since the introduction of this legislation, I have received only limited correspondence from Rhode Islanders expressing support for it. Whoever has this bill high on their agenda has not consulted with many of my constituents or with many of the people from across the Nation who write to me.

Mr. President, I know that people of good will and strong faith can differ on this sensitive subject. And I knew that the Senate's vote would be a lopsided one. But if we truly believe in family values, we should remember that the gay men and lesbians whom this legislation will affect are our sons and daughters, our sisters and brothers, our friends and colleagues. Before we enact legislation that further isolates them from the mainstream of society, we should consider carefully whether this legislation is needed, desired, or desirable. I do not believe that it is.

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business Friday, September 13, the Federal debt stood at \$5,217,304,758,895.91.

One year ago, September 13, 1995, the Federal debt stood at \$4,967,411,000,000.

Five years ago, September 13, 1991, the Federal debt stood at \$3,623,683,000,000.

Twenty-five years ago, September 13, 1971, the Federal debt stood at \$416,135,000,000. This reflects an increase of more than \$4 trillion during the 25 years from 1971 to 1996.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1997

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the pending business.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3662) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1997, and for other purposes.

The Senate resumed consideration of the bill.

Mr. PRESSLER. Mr. President, if the managers would agree, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the committee amendment to offer an amendment at this point. And perhaps it could be dealt with later, if the managers of the bill would agree. It is an amendment that addresses concerns confronting cattle producers in the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### AMENDMENT NO. 5351

(Purpose: To promote the livestock industry)

Mr. PRESSLER. Mr. President, I send an amendment to the desk and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from South Dakota [Mr. PRESSLER] proposes an amendment numbered 5351.

Mr. PRESSLER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that further reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Amendments Submitted.")

Mr. PRESSLER. Mr. President this amendment attempts to address many of the concerns confronting cattle producers in the United States today. The issues of packer concentration, lack of price discovery, retail price spreads and low prices have been foremost on the minds of cattle producers and consumers throughout South Dakota and the Nation.

To say these are concerns of my fellow South Dakotans is a gross understatement. Thousands of South Dakotans have written, called, or visited with me on this issue. This is an issue that strikes at the heart of their ability to run their farms and businesses and provide for their families. The time has come for Congress to take action.

For the past 2 years, I have been pressing the Clinton administration to address meatpacker concentration and utilize existing antitrust laws to make sure that cattle are sold in an open and competitive market. Though the administration has taken some steps over the past several months, I believe these measures are marginal at best. Stronger action is needed.

What is of great concern to producers is the fact that while cattle prices have been at or near record lows, retail prices have not shown any significant drop. In fact, just the opposite is happening.

In 1995, at Eich's Meat Market, in Salem, SD, the price of a choice yield grade 2 hind quarter was \$1.65 per pound—that is the highest price paid at this locker since it was opened. This past summer it was \$1.60 per pound. The same hind quarter was selling for \$1.57 per pound in 1993. In contrast, in 1993 live cattle prices were \$80 or higher. Yet, in 1995, live prices have been as low as \$51.50.

This represents a combination punch to South Dakota ranchers—as producers, they are getting fewer dollars for their livestock; yet, as consumers, ranchers—armed with fewer dollars—are forced to pay more both in terms of real dollars and as a portion of their budget to put their own product on the dinner table.

The influence of packer concentration on the market cannot be overlooked or dismissed. Fifteen years ago, the top four packers held about 40 percent of the market. Today market share is over 85 percent.

Economic studies have shown that this kind of market concentration provides these firms with the kind of power needed to control prices.

At a recent Senate Commerce Committee hearing that I chaired on this subject, it was made abundantly clear that all too often cattle producers do not have free, open, or competitive markets in which to sell their cattle. The Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, [GIPSA] is charged with insuring a free and open marketplace. GIPSA must be more vigilant in assuring this.

Only through enforcement of existing antitrust will we be able to ensure the long-term economic viability of the U.S. cattle industry. South Dakota ranchers agree.

I have held two Senate hearings on this subject over the past year. I also have introduced several bills to address concerns that cattle producers have told me must be addressed. Other Senators have offered their own proposals. Some are controversial. What I have done with this amendment is incorporate those measures that I believe we can pass this year. Our cattlemen need relief now, not a promise of future action at some point next year.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a summary of my amendment be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. PRESSLER. I do not believe this is a partisan issue. Nor should this amendment be treated as one. Both Republicans and Democrats from cattle-producing States I expect will embrace this amendment. Some may say tougher action is needed. They're right. The goal here is to do what we can now. This amendment I believe is a strong step in the right direction.

Again, while my amendment does not include everything I think is needed I believe it is a measure that can pass